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ABSTRACT

Even within the perceived homogeneity of the American hinterlands, a plethora of social issues and concerns threaten contemporary society. Among applied communicators, and especially among public relations practitioners, increasingly complex relationships must be satisfactorily nurtured so that people and institutions can be helped to seek resolution to the challenging problems associated with rapid and dramatic social change. Public relations developed because of the extraordinary complexities of contemporary society, although many scholars note that "public-relations-like" activities have existed throughout the history of humankind. J. Grunig and T. Hunt (1984) pinpoint four ascending models which have evolved in public relations practice: (1) the press agentry model; (2) the public information model; (3) the 2-way asymmetrical model; and (4) the 2-way symmetrical model. Evidence suggests that the 2-way symmetrical model (based on negotiation, compromise, and understanding) is the most effective and most ethical of these. D. Kruckeberg and K. Starck (1988) offer a community model, which also includes a strong ethical and egalitarian component. Regardless of which model practitioners embrace, they generally profess an overriding concern about professional ethics. A democratic culture and government are important to the ideology of public relations, although nothing inherently restricts implementation of public relations practice in nations having noncapitalistic economic systems. When scholars and practitioners proceed in the direction of including a theory of society, they can begin constructive work toward a usable theory of ethical community relationship-building. (NKA)

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EASTERN COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION

"Public Relations as Ideology"

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Presented in the Program:

Public Relations Ethics:

Developing Models

Of Organizational "Relationship-Building"

In The Community

10:45 a.m. to noon
Friday, April 28, 1995

At the Annual Convention
Of the Eastern Communication Association

William Penn Westin Hotel
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INTRODUCTION

A recent Sunday newspaper in a medium-sized Iowa metropolitan area included these front-page headlines:

"El Mundo Latino
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(Story about the large number of Hispanics who are moving into an urban area that has endured decades of racial tensions between whites and the small minority of blacks)

"'Just regular people' Sons of Silence member disputes police description of the group"
(Story about the local chapter of a national motorcycle club, some of whose members have been charged with racketeering)

If these stories weren't sufficient to create a pall over many suburban Sunday dinners, a range of front-page national and international news undoubtedly garnered local interest, including:

"Eight years/ Iraq sentences New Hampton native to eight years in jail for crossing the border"
(Story about a hometown man being held captive in Iraq)[1]

And, lest readers would think Iowans suffer disproportionate strife in their lives, an inside news page warned:

"Confrontations spread as militias flourish in Montana"[2]
(Story about U.S. citizens challenging the authority of the Federal government)

We live in unsettled times; immediately and directly, a plethora of social issues and concerns threaten almost everyone in contemporary society. Even within the perceived homogeneity of the hinterlands of Iowa, *existing* relationships are being strained, and virtually everyone is being forced into *new* relationships within social systems that are becoming both increasingly diverse and correspondingly divisive.

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[1] *Waterloo/Cedar Falls Courier*, 26 March 1995, A1.

[2] Ibid., A6.

Among applied communicators, and especially among public relations practitioners, increasingly complex relationships must be satisfactorily nurtured through profound, perhaps radical--but by-and-large yet unproven--means. The ultimate goal must be a usable theory of ethical community relationship-building that can help people and institutions worldwide seek resolution to the challenging problems associated with rapid and dramatic social change--both within their existing relationships as well as within those that will inevitably and irrevocably emerge.

Public relations is a relatively new occupational specialization that developed because of the extra-ordinary complexities of contemporary society. Many scholars convincingly note that "public relations-like" activities have existed throughout the history of humankind, particularly in people's attempts to obtain and maintain political power; however, contemporary public relations essentially evolved at the beginning of the Twentieth Century in response to specific social and political needs that have become geometrically more pronounced as we approach the millennium.

Grunig and Hunt identify public relations as "management of communication between an organization and its publics."[3] This definition's apparent simplicity belies its profundity, in part because of the public relations models these scholars have conceptualized to support and operationalize this definition. Grunig and Hunt say four corresponding models have evolved that progressively have increased in their sophistication from the most primitive public relations practice, i.e., the *press agentry model*, to the most sophisticated, effective and ethical model of public relations. The latter is dubbed the "excellent" *two-way symmetrical model* in which practitioners:

> ... serve as mediators between organizations and their publics. Their goal is mutual understanding between organizations and their publics. These practitioners ... may use social science theory and methods, but they usually use theories of communication rather than theories of persuasion for planning and evaluation of public relations ....

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[3]James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt, *Managing Public Relations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 6.

> (Two-way symmetrical public relations) ... consists more of a dialogue than a monologue. If persuasion occurs, the public should be just as likely to persuade the organization's management to change attitudes or behavior as the organization is likely to change the publics' attitudes or behavior. Ideally, both management and publics will change somewhat after a public relations effort.
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> Frequently, however, neither will change attitudes or behavior. The public relations staff brings the two groups together, and, as long as both communicate well enough to understand the position of the other, the public relations effort will have been successful.[4]

THE TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL MODEL DIFFERS FROM THE OTHERS

It is important to understand how this *two-way symmetrical model* differs from the other three models that preceded it in the practice of public relations. Chronologically in their evolution, these models are: 1) the press agentry model; 2) the public information model; and 3) the two-way asymmetrical model.

Grunig explains:

> The *press agentry* model applies when a communication program strives for favorable publicity, especially in the mass media. A program based on the *public information* model uses "journalists in residence" to disseminate relatively objective information through the mass media and controlled media such as newsletters, brochures, and direct mail.
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> Both press agentry and public information are one-way models of public relations; they describe communication programs that are not based on research and strategic planning .... Press agentry and public information also are asymmetrical models: They try to make the organization look good either through propaganda (press agentry) or by disseminating only favorable information (public information).

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[4]Ibid., 22-23.

> The third model, the *two-way asymmetrical* model, is a more sophisticated approach in that it uses research to develop messages that are most likely to persuade strategic publics to behave as the organization wants ....

'EXCELLENT' DEPARTMENTS PRACTICE A *MIXED-MOTIVE* MODEL

Grunig acknowledges, however, that most "excellent" public relations departments do not practice a "pure" symmetrical model. Rather, excellent departments:

> ... serve as advocates both for their organizations and for strategic publics. Thus, excellent departments generally practice a mixture of the two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical models--a *mixed-motive* model--although their practice is more symmetrical than asymmetrical.[5]

Each of these four models--and conceivably a few more worldwide--continues to be practiced among professional public relations practitioners. However, compelling evidence suggests that the best and most effective (as well as the most ethical) public relations is the Grunig and Hunt "two-way symmetrical model" that is based on negotiation, compromise and understanding.[6]

PUBLIC RELATIONS EXISTS TODAY BECAUSE OF LOSS OF COMMUNITY

Kruckeberg and Starck say a fundamental reason why public relations practice exists today is because of a loss of *community*, a loss that is evident within many contemporary societies and especially so within the most highly developed and technologically advanced regions of the world.

Such loss of community has resulted from the new means of communication and transportation that have destroyed the sense of geographic *community* that had existed within societies before the advent of these sophisticated technologies--beginning in the era from about the 1890s to 1917 and extending throughout the present.

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[5]James E. Grunig, "Communication, Public Relations, and Effective Organizations: An Overview of the Book," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, ed. James E. Grunig (Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), 18-19.

[6]The best singular anthology of these findings are found in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management.*

Kruckeberg and Starck say this loss of community explains why public relations evolved within the same timeframe as did these revolutionary new means of communication and transportation. Using a medical metaphor, they conclude that public relations practitioners do not understand nor appreciate this fundamental reason why public relations practice exists. Thus, Kruckeberg and Starck conclude that practitioners usually address and attempt primarily to remedy the symptoms of their organizations' unhealthy relationships with their publics; these practitioners most often do not deal with the basic public relations pathologies, i.e., the essential illnesses of society and, more specifically, of their clients' relationships to the various elements of society.

In keeping with the "two-way symmetrical model" of public relations, but stressing "community restoration and maintenance," Kruckeberg and Starck conclude that the way most public relations professionals practice public relations (i.e., the models that Grunig and Hunt would call the *press agentry model* that primarily uses publicity, the *public information model* that uses "journalists in residence" and the *two-way asymmetrical model* that applies scientific principles of persuasion) may have a place in parts of a public relations program, but should not represent overall public relations practice. Rather, they posit that "public relations is the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community."[7] Thus, Kruckeberg and Starck accept the compromise of the "mixed-motive" model, but recognize the superlative mutual benefits of the "two-way symmetrical model."

AN ETHICAL COMPONENT IS IMMEDIATELY OBVIOUS

A strong ethical component--indeed, foundation--is immediately obvious in both the Grunig and Hunt two-way symmetrical model and the Kruckeberg and Starck community model, in great part because of both models' fundamental egalitarian nature and the models' pro-active respect for and consideration of all parties' perspectives and interests. Furthermore, Grunig and Grunig are quick to point out that the two-way symmetrical model avoids the problem of ethical relativism because it defines ethics as a *process* of public relations rather than as an *outcome*.

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[7]Dean Kruckeberg and Kenneth Starck, *Public Relations and Community: A Reconstructed Theory* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 21.

That is, Grunig and Grunig say that the professional practice of symmetrical public relations provides a forum for dialogue, discussion and discourse on issues for which people of different values generally come to different conclusions.[8]

In contrast, stringent adherence to ethics is not to be assumed in the practice of the three other public relations models, because ethical conduct is hardly inherent. For example, Dozier cautions that there is an important ethical distinction between each of the "two-way" models, observing that the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model have different goals. Organizations practicing asymmetrical public relations seek environmental domination, whereas organizations embracing the two-way symmetrical model seek cooperation.[9]

Neither do Grunig and White offer optimism about the likelihood for ethical practitioner conduct using any of the three asymmetrical models, observing that an asymmetrical *worldview*:

> ... steers public relations practitioners toward actions that are unethical, socially irresponsible, and ineffective. ... (P)ractitioners with an asymmetrical worldview presuppose that the organization knows best and that publics benefit from "cooperating" with it. Asymmetrical practitioners with a social conscience ... sometimes convince themselves that they are manipulating publics for the benefit of those publics ....
>
> ... (I)n spite of the good intentions of practitioners--it is difficult, if not impossible, to practice public relations in a way that is ethical and socially responsible using an asymmetrical model.[10]

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[8]James E. Grunig and Larissa A. Grunig, "Models of Public Relations and Communication," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 308.

[9]David M. Dozier, "The Organizational Roles of Communications and Public Relations Practitioners," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 346.

[10]James E. Grunig and Jon White, "The Effect of Worldviews on Public Relations Theory and Practice," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 40.

"PROFESSIONAL" ASSOCIATIONS ENDORSE PUBLIC RELATIONS ETHICS

Nevertheless, regardless of which model they may primarily embrace, public relations practitioners generally profess an overriding concern about "professional" ethics; furthermore, ethics codes are institutionalized within most public relations professional associations.[11] However, with perhaps undue cynicism toward public relations professionalization and its concomitant requisite for "professional" ethics, Kruckeberg opines:

> Over the years, practitioners in many countries have attempted to 'professionalise' public relations practice; the most cited reason for such professionalisation allegedly has been to safeguard society against the potential misuses and abuses of public relations practice.
>
> However, one might speculate that such attempts to professionalise have been primarily to enhance the 'professionals' class, status and power within their communities and societies. [12]

Kruckeberg observes that, when an occupational specialization "professionalizes," the whole professional community becomes culpable and answerable to society for individuals' professional practice within this collectively defined and agreed-upon profession. Professionals thereby must accept the burden of policing their own ranks to assure that the profession is practiced by all its practitioners in a manner conforming to agreed-upon professional ethics.[13]

In addition to said ethical responsibility of professionals to protect society, Kruckeberg notes that ethics are of fundamental importance to any "professional" occupation because such ethics fundamentally define this occupation's very existence within society; thus, ethics allow the professionals to know themselves and who they are:

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[11] All of the major public relations textbooks discuss ethics and report on professional associations' various codes. A book that attempts to integrate ethics throughout its content is, Mark P. McElreath, *Managing Systematic and Ethical Public Relations* (Madison, Wis.: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1993).

[12] Dean Kruckeberg, "Ethical Decision-Making in Public Relations," *International Public Relations Review* 15 (1992): 33.

[13] Ibid., 34.

> Ethical values are important because they allow us to define ourselves as a professional community by defining our relationship with society. It is we--not society--who are the primary beneficiaries of our professional ethics, and we must guard jealously the manifest right and obligation to prescribe and then practice such ethical behavior--and to banish from our professional community those transgressors who choose not to conform.[14]

TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL AND COMMUNITY MODEL ARE ETHICAL

The preceding discussion argues that the Grunig and Hunt "excellent" two-way symmetrical model and the Kruckeberg and Starck community model--which are completely compatible, but which have somewhat different perspectives--are the only consistently viable options for ethical public relations practice that can serve contemporary society's needs while, in fact, best serving the needs of practitioners' organizations or clients.

Given this, one must examine appropriate public relations ethics for these models that can help define practitioners' relationship with society. However, said examination of ethical codes of most public relations professional associations proves disappointing; these codes' precepts and articles generally are: 1) either so abstract as to be uninterpretable and nonoperational; or 2) so specific as to lack useful projection.

Public relations ethical codes, in general, most often deal with issues such as truthfulness and fairness and with the integrity and openness of media channels--all worthy professional concerns, to be sure. However, articulation of these professional ethics is highly vulnerable to criticism by dissatisfied public relations scholars while being oftentimes essentially unknown or ignored by many professionals who rely--they rationalize--upon a basic and simplistic interpretation of "the Golden rule," i.e., doing unto others as they would have done unto themselves. It is relatively easy to present a credible argument against the value and efficacy of such codified ethics, especially those codifications that attempt to present a comprehensive range of "Thou Shalt Nots ...."

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[14] Dean Kruckeberg, "Ethical Values Define Public Relations Community," *Public Relations Update* 2 (April 1993): 1.

Conversely, thoughtful reflection reveals an interesting dilemma of a different type in the consideration of ethics for the "excellent" two-way symmetrical model and the community model of public relations. This is because ethics really do not apply to these models, i.e., codified ethics are superfluous. Ethics are critically important to police the inherently unethical asymmetrical models of public relations because they provide parameters beyond which the practice of such models should not transcend. Such ethics' codified articulation, albeit always inadequate, must be deemed essential in the practice of asymmetrical models to attempt to restrict both the opportunities and the tendencies for professional malfeasance.

Consideration and application of the "excellent" two-way symmetrical model and of the community model, however, call for other considerations, i.e., definition and clarification of values and ideology. Of course in the asymmetrical models, fundamental values are certainly present in the articulation of ethics. However, a significant difference exists between asymmetrical and symmetrical models; ethics and their articulation must be of primary importance in the inherently unethical asymmetrical models. In turn, in symmetrical models, it is the values themselves that are of primary importance in a pro-active effort toward symmetrical relationship-building.

ARTICULATION AND ACTUALIZATION OF VALUES ARE PRIMARY

Somewhat analogous to New Testament Christian writings in which believers no longer felt condemned and--in that sense--bound by Old Testament law, the symmetrical models of public relations are not bound by ethics. Rather, the articulation and actualization of the values, themselves, are of primary importance. Symmetrical models of public relations are highly value-laden, as Grunig and White suggest in their description of "ethical" organizations that build symmetrical, mutually beneficial relationships:

> ... (A)n excellent worldview for public relations ... should be *ethical* in that it helps organizations build caring--even loving--*relationships* with other individuals and groups they affect in a society or the world.[15]

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[15]James E. Grunig and Jon White, "The Effect of Worldviews on Public Relations Theory and Practice," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 38.

Ideologically, public relations is closely identified with democracy and with capitalism. There is considerable rationale to appreciate linkages with the former, but the latter association is unduly restrictive. Sriramesh and White provide tacit endorsement for a *democratic* culture and government in their proposition stating:

> Societal cultures that display lower levels of power distance, authoritarianism, and individualism, but have higher levels of interpersonal trust among workers, are most likely to develop ... excellent public relations practices....[16]

Although public relations is commonly practiced by profit-making organizations in capitalistic economic systems, its successful application in a range of organizations in nations having noncapitalistic economic systems illustrates that nothing inherently restricts implementation of public relations practice in such noncapitalistic systems within nations having democratic cultures and governments. Rather, it is to a great extent the affinity between democracy and capitalism that fosters the greater use of public relations practice in capitalistic economic systems.

However, to be useful in public relations theory-building and model development, deliberation of ideology in public relations should extend far beyond consideration of governmental and economic systems--up to and including a theory of society. Hardt's mandate for a requisite theory of society for the meaningful study of mass communication is equally apropos for the consideration of the role and function of public relations:

> ... the study of mass communication can make sense only in the context of a theory of society; thus, questions of freedom and control of expression, of private and public spheres of communication, and of a democratic system of mass communication must be raised as part of an attempt to define the position of individuals in contemporary industrialized Western societies.[17]

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[16] K. Sriramesh and Jon White, "Societal Culture and Public Relations," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 611

[17] Hanno Hardt, *Social Theories of the Press* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1979), 35.

Ideologically, public relations needs to consider a theory of society that satisfactorily transcends more narrow political ideologies. Thus, for the inherently ethical symmetrical models of public relations, codification of ethics becomes moot or, at best, a pedestrian secondary outcome to the definition and clarification of values and ideology that become of primary importance.

SUMMARY

Throughout the world, existing relationships are being strained, and virtually everyone is being forced into new relationships. These increasingly complex relationships must be satisfactory nurtured by public relations practitioners, with the ultimate goal being a usable theory of ethical community relationship-building. Recommended models are the Grunig and Hunt "excellent" two-way symmetrical model and the compatible Kruckeberg and Starck community model. Both are inherently ethical because of their fundamental egalitarian nature and pro-active respect for and consideration of all parties' perspectives and interests; furthermore, the "excellent" two-way symmetrical model defines ethics as a process.

Codified public relations professional ethics are both inadequate and easily ignored, albeit requisite to the practice of asymmetrical public relations which inherently tends to be unethical. However, for symmetrical public relations practice, which is highly value-laden, such codified ethics are superfluous. Rather than an undue concern about ethics, of primary importance in symmetrical public relations practice are the definition and clarification of values and ideology in a pro-active effort toward symmetrical relationship-building.

A democratic culture and government are important to the ideology of public relations, although nothing inherently restricts implementation of public relations practice in nations having noncapitalistic economic systems. However, consideration of ideology in public relations should be comprehensive to the point of including a theory of society. When scholars and practitioners proceed in these directions, they can begin constructive work toward a usable theory of ethical community relationship-building.

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[5]James E. Grunig, "Communication, Public Relations, and Effective Organizations: An Overview of the Book," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, ed. James E. Grunig (Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992), 18-19.

[6]The best singular anthology of these findings are found in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management.*

Kruckeberg and Starck say this loss of community explains why public relations evolved within the same timeframe as did these revolutionary new means of communication and transportation. Using a medical metaphor, they conclude that public relations practitioners do not understand nor appreciate this fundamental reason why public relations practice exists. Thus, Kruckeberg and Starck conclude that practitioners usually address and attempt primarily to remedy the symptoms of their organizations' unhealthy relationships with their publics; these practitioners most often do not deal with the basic public relations pathologies, i.e., the essential illnesses of society and, more specifically, of their clients' relationships to the various elements of society.

In keeping with the "two-way symmetrical model" of public relations, but stressing "community restoration and maintenance," Kruckeberg and Starck conclude that the way most public relations professionals practice public relations (i.e., the models that Grunig and Hunt would call the *press agentry model* that primarily uses publicity, the *public information model* that uses "journalists in residence" and the *two-way asymmetrical model* that applies scientific principles of persuasion) may have a place in parts of a public relations program, but should not represent overall public relations practice. Rather, they posit that "public relations is the active attempt to restore and maintain a sense of community."[7] Thus, Kruckeberg and Starck accept the compromise of the "mixed-motive" model, but recognize the superlative mutual benefits of the "two-way symmetrical model."

AN ETHICAL COMPONENT IS IMMEDIATELY OBVIOUS

A strong ethical component--indeed, foundation--is immediately obvious in both the Grunig and Hunt two-way symmetrical model and the Kruckeberg and Starck community model, in great part because of both models' fundamental egalitarian nature and the models' pro-active respect for and consideration of all parties' perspectives and interests. Furthermore, Grunig and Grunig are quick to point out that the two-way symmetrical model avoids the problem of ethical relativism because it defines ethics as a *process* of public relations rather than as an *outcome*.

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[7]Dean Kruckeberg and Kenneth Starck, *Public Relations and Community: A Reconstructed Theory* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 21.

That is, Grunig and Grunig say that the professional practice of symmetrical public relations provides a forum for dialogue, discussion and discourse on issues for which people of different values generally come to different conclusions.[8]

In contrast, stringent adherence to ethics is not to be assumed in the practice of the three other public relations models, because ethical conduct is hardly inherent. For example, Dozier cautions that there is an important ethical distinction between each of the "two-way" models, observing that the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model have different goals. Organizations practicing asymmetrical public relations seek environmental domination, whereas organizations embracing the two-way symmetrical model seek cooperation.[9]

Neither do Grunig and White offer optimism about the likelihood for ethical practitioner conduct using any of the three asymmetrical models, observing that an asymmetrical *worldview*:

> ... steers public relations practitioners toward actions that are unethical, socially irresponsible, and ineffective. ... (P)ractitioners with an asymmetrical worldview presuppose that the organization knows best and that publics benefit from "cooperating" with it. Asymmetrical practitioners with a social conscience ... sometimes convince themselves that they are manipulating publics for the benefit of those publics ....
>
> ... (I)n spite of the good intentions of practitioners--it is difficult, if not impossible, to practice public relations in a way that is ethical and socially responsible using an asymmetrical model.[10]

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[8]James E. Grunig and Larissa A. Grunig, "Models of Public Relations and Communication," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 308.

[9]David M. Dozier, "The Organizational Roles of Communications and Public Relations Practitioners," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 346.

[10]James E. Grunig and Jon White, "The Effect of Worldviews on Public Relations Theory and Practice," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 40.

"PROFESSIONAL" ASSOCIATIONS ENDORSE PUBLIC RELATIONS ETHICS

Nevertheless, regardless of which model they may primarily embrace, public relations practitioners generally profess an overriding concern about "professional" ethics; furthermore, ethics codes are institutionalized within most public relations professional associations.[11] However, with perhaps undue cynicism toward public relations professionalization and its concomitant requisite for "professional" ethics, Kruckeberg opines:

> Over the years, practitioners in many countries have attempted to 'professionalise' public relations practice; the most cited reason for such professionalisation allegedly has been to safeguard society against the potential misuses and abuses of public relations practice.
>
> However, one might speculate that such attempts to professionalise have been primarily to enhance the 'professionals' class, status and power within their communities and societies. [12]

Kruckeberg observes that, when an occupational specialization "professionalizes," the whole professional community becomes culpable and answerable to society for individuals' professional practice within this collectively defined and agreed-upon profession. Professionals thereby must accept the burden of policing their own ranks to assure that the profession is practiced by all its practitioners in a manner conforming to agreed-upon professional ethics.[13]

In addition to said ethical responsibility of professionals to protect society, Kruckeberg notes that ethics are of fundamental importance to any "professional" occupation because such ethics fundamentally define this occupation's very existence within society; thus, ethics allow the professionals to know themselves and who they are:

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11 All of the major public relations textbooks discuss ethics and report on professional associations' various codes. A book that attempts to integrate ethics throughout its content is, Mark P. McElreath, *Managing Systematic and Ethical Public Relations* (Madison, Wis.: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1993).

12 Dean Kruckeberg, "Ethical Decision-Making in Public Relations," *International Public Relations Review* 15 (1992): 33.

13 Ibid., 34.

> Ethical values are important because they allow us to define ourselves as a professional community by defining our relationship with society. It is we--not society--who are the primary beneficiaries of our professional ethics, and we must guard jealously the manifest right and obligation to prescribe and then practice such ethical behavior--and to banish from our professional community those transgressors who choose not to conform.[14]

TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL AND COMMUNITY MODEL ARE ETHICAL

The preceding discussion argues that the Grunig and Hunt "excellent" two-way symmetrical model and the Kruckeberg and Starck community model--which are completely compatible, but which have somewhat different perspectives--are the only consistently viable options for ethical public relations practice that can serve contemporary society's needs while, in fact, best serving the needs of practitioners' organizations or clients.

Given this, one must examine appropriate public relations ethics for these models that can help define practitioners' relationship with society. However, said examination of ethical codes of most public relations professional associations proves disappointing; these codes' precepts and articles generally are: 1) either so abstract as to be uninterpretable and nonoperational; or 2) so specific as to lack useful projection.

Public relations ethical codes, in general, most often deal with issues such as truthfulness and fairness and with the integrity and openness of media channels--all worthy professional concerns, to be sure. However, articulation of these professional ethics is highly vulnerable to criticism by dissatisfied public relations scholars while being oftentimes essentially unknown or ignored by many professionals who rely--they rationalize--upon a basic and simplistic interpretation of "the Golden rule," i.e., doing unto others as they would have done unto themselves. It is relatively easy to present a credible argument against the value and efficacy of such codified ethics, especially those codifications that attempt to present a comprehensive range of "Thou Shalt Nots ...."

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[14] Dean Kruckeberg, "Ethical Values Define Public Relations Community," *Public Relations Update* 2 (April 1993): 1.

Conversely, thoughtful reflection reveals an interesting dilemma of a different type in the consideration of ethics for the "excellent" two-way symmetrical model and the community model of public relations. This is because ethics really do not apply to these models, i.e., codified ethics are superfluous. Ethics are critically important to police the inherently unethical asymmetrical models of public relations because they provide parameters beyond which the practice of such models should not transcend. Such ethics' codified articulation, albeit always inadequate, must be deemed essential in the practice of asymmetrical models to attempt to restrict both the opportunities and the tendencies for professional malfeasance.

Consideration and application of the "excellent" two-way symmetrical model and of the community model, however, call for other considerations, i.e., definition and clarification of values and ideology. Of course in the asymmetrical models, fundamental values are certainly present in the articulation of ethics. However, a significant difference exists between asymmetrical and symmetrical models; ethics and their articulation must be of primary importance in the inherently unethical asymmetrical models. In turn, in symmetrical models, it is the values themselves that are of primary importance in a pro-active effort toward symmetrical relationship-building.

ARTICULATION AND ACTUALIZATION OF VALUES ARE PRIMARY

Somewhat analogous to New Testament Christian writings in which believers no longer felt condemned and--in that sense--bound by Old Testament law, the symmetrical models of public relations are not bound by ethics. Rather, the articulation and actualization of the values, themselves, are of primary importance. Symmetrical models of public relations are highly value-laden, as Grunig and White suggest in their description of "ethical" organizations that build symmetrical, mutually beneficial relationships:

> ... (A)n excellent worldview for public relations ... should be *ethical* in that it helps organizations build caring--even loving--*relationships* with other individuals and groups they affect in a society or the world.[15]

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[15]James E. Grunig and Jon White, "The Effect of Worldviews on Public Relations Theory and Practice," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 38.

Ideologically, public relations is closely identified with democracy and with capitalism. There is considerable rationale to appreciate linkages with the former, but the latter association is unduly restrictive. Sriramesh and White provide tacit endorsement for a *democratic* culture and government in their proposition stating:

> Societal cultures that display lower levels of power distance, authoritarianism, and individualism, but have higher levels of interpersonal trust among workers, are most likely to develop ... excellent public relations practices....[16]

Although public relations is commonly practiced by profit-making organizations in capitalistic economic systems, its successful application in a range of organizations in nations having noncapitalistic economic systems illustrates that nothing inherently restricts implementation of public relations practice in such noncapitalistic systems within nations having democratic cultures and governments. Rather, it is to a great extent the affinity between democracy and capitalism that fosters the greater use of public relations practice in capitalistic economic systems.

However, to be useful in public relations theory-building and model development, deliberation of ideology in public relations should extend far beyond consideration of governmental and economic systems--up to and including a theory of society. Hardt's mandate for a requisite theory of society for the meaningful study of mass communication is equally apropos for the consideration of the role and function of public relations:

> ... the study of mass communication can make sense only in the context of a theory of society; thus, questions of freedom and control of expression, of private and public spheres of communication, and of a democratic system of mass communication must be raised as part of an attempt to define the position of individuals in contemporary industrialized Western societies.[17]

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[16] K. Sriramesh and Jon White, "Societal Culture and Public Relations," in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, 611

[17] Hanno Hardt, *Social Theories of the Press* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1979), 35.

Ideologically, public relations needs to consider a theory of society that satisfactorily transcends more narrow political ideologies. Thus, for the inherently ethical symmetrical models of public relations, codification of ethics becomes moot or, at best, a pedestrian secondary outcome to the definition and clarification of values and ideology that become of primary importance.

SUMMARY

Throughout the world, existing relationships are being strained, and virtually everyone is being forced into new relationships. These increasingly complex relationships must be satisfactory nurtured by public relations practitioners, with the ultimate goal being a usable theory of ethical community relationship-building. Recommended models are the Grunig and Hunt "excellent" two-way symmetrical model and the compatible Kruckeberg and Starck community model. Both are inherently ethical because of their fundamental egalitarian nature and pro-active respect for and consideration of all parties' perspectives and interests; furthermore, the "excellent" two-way symmetrical model defines ethics as a process.

Codified public relations professional ethics are both inadequate and easily ignored, albeit requisite to the practice of asymmetrical public relations which inherently tends to be unethical. However, for symmetrical public relations practice, which is highly value-laden, such codified ethics are superfluous. Rather than an undue concern about ethics, of primary importance in symmetrical public relations practice are the definition and clarification of values and ideology in a pro-active effort toward symmetrical relationship-building.

A democratic culture and government are important to the ideology of public relations, although nothing inherently restricts implementation of public relations practice in nations having noncapitalistic economic systems. However, consideration of ideology in public relations should be comprehensive to the point of including a theory of society. When scholars and practitioners proceed in these directions, they can begin constructive work toward a usable theory of ethical community relationship-building.